

Wisconsin Folks: Masters of Tradition



Mona Kochendorfer (b. 1933) has been teaching traditional folk painting since 1957 and Dutch Hindeloopen style of painting since 1985. As with the more familiar Norwegian rosemaling, different regions of the Netherlands have distinct styles of folk painting; Hindeloopen originates in the northern Dutch province of Friesland. 19th century Dutch immigrants brought the art form to Wisconsin when they settled primarily along Lake Michigan in such towns as Oostburg and Little Chute, or in western Wisconsin in the area where Mona was born (Spring Valley). Flowers are the most common element, especially roses, tulips, daisies and carnations, with each carrying a religious significance (e.g., tulips represent the Christian Trinity). Artists typically paint Dutch Hindeloopen freehand on wooden objects such as plates, boxes, bowls and furniture.

Mona first learned folk painting as a girl, from a neighbor who taught her Norwegian rosemaling. In high school, she discovered Swedish folk painting. In 1984, she learned both the Assendelfter and Hindeloopen styles of Dutch decorative painting. Mona's mentor in the Hindeloopen process was Maud Oving from the town of Hindeloopen, the Netherlands, who in 1991, appointed Mona as the U.S. representative of Hindeloopen folk painting.

Mona loves to present information about this folk art to the public. "Although people of Dutch descent have these lovely examples in their homes, they do not always recognize them as Dutch folk painting. Education concerning the painting styles would enhance the cultural value of the pieces, and would give the owners a sense of pride in their heritage."

When teaching how to paint Hindeloopen, Mona stresses proper brush strokes, principles of design, motifs, borders and composition, as well as proper color mixes. Her most recent apprentice, Rose Anderson of Bruce, Wisconsin, was eager to learn Hindeloopen because, "I believe that learning about the folk arts of other cultures helps us understand the influence of one culture upon another and helps us connect as human beings."